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Statement submitted by Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Inclusion of Women with Disabilities in New Approaches to Poverty Eradication

The world stands in the midst of a global economic crisis. Diverse steps are being taken at various levels to meet the challenges of crumbling economies. In this macro-economic instability, it is not surprising that poverty eradication in general and related to women with disabilities specific remains an issue ignored by States. At an Economic and Social Council meeting in 2012 States agreed that “Decent and productive employment — coupled with safety nets for protecting the most vulnerable — should be at the core of efforts to eradicate poverty — warning that global economic woes now threatened the very existence of such initiatives”.

However little attention is being paid to disparities that are increasing with change. The social disparities which exist across the globe keep many women on the margins. Though gender disparities are diminishing within that circle, women with disabilities remain on the periphery. Their invisibility has contributed to their marginalization. Women with disabilities however are a heterogenous group with not only diverse disabilities but also face multiple barriers.

Women with disabilities and the financial sector

Based on data available we pose two questions:

Do Women with Disabilities Have Economic Rights? As majority States have signed Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, besides many national laws prohibit discrimination and call for reasonable accommodation. However, many national disability laws are still to be altered on the lines of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and give women equal rights.

Data as per World Report on Disability 2011, shows there are between 785 and 975 million persons with disabilities of working aged (15 years or older), mostly in developing countries, where the informal economy is extensive and most are women. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Art. 27) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Art 11) provide women with disabilities the Right to work. Both the Conventions taken together prohibit discrimination and call for reasonable accommodation. However, data and anecdotal evidence, has shown that the access to work of women with disabilities in any form is minimal and places them amongst the poorest.

Do They Have the Opportunity to Use their Rights?

In the case of women with disabilities, it is an “interlocking failure of consumption entitlement of non-development of capability, lack of legal capacity, ownership, and dependency”.

It must be noted that women with disabilities are not a homogenous group. There are many who stand on the periphery of rights and entitlements. Women with psycho-social disabilities have little legal capacity. It is essential to pay attention to

the issue of legal capacity arising out of the economic sector such as right to property, banking services and even the right to vote a basic citizenship right. Rural as well as indigenous women with disabilities have few opportunities to earn independent cash income.

If we are to curb these inequalities, we have to set in place new principles and standards of governance. We have to consider in its place participatory governance which works on the basic principles of poverty reduction, social equity and the agency of women.

States need to address gendered disability discrimination in poverty eradication. Its existence results in structural poverty, manifesting itself in not only financial but also social institutions which are slow to change. We reason that economic redistribution is essential to create an environment that is just and equal but also believe that it can only be useful when provided in the framework of justiciable rights. This could be made possible through the combination of extending Financial Services and Products as per need and choice and situating these within a conceptual framework that works.

Poverty eradication thus becomes a partnership between the State and its citizens. Our aim is to see if women with disabilities are provided the existing rights made available to other women. The 61st Commission on the Status of Women is the best platform for initiating a discussion on inclusion and that concerns can be included in policy and reforms.

The Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 agenda is on its way to implementation. However, in the case of women with disabilities unless States take specific action immediately inclusion will remain a distant dream to achieve.

Despite all these programs and principles why are women with disabilities excluded and remain at the bottom parameters of poverty and what the States do?

Recommendations

Our major concern is the slow pace and fragmentation of our work and inadequate coordination and lack of funding. One of the key themes we need to discuss is the institutional framework for sustainable and equal development. Efforts by communities and people to benefit others bring to the forefront our most positive aspects. The key is our sense of responsibility to those with whom we share resources. Create a global vision toward which humanity strives and serve as norms and guiding principles. Even the most inspiring vision will become a reality when the global community with support of civil society and the women concerned commit to eradicate poverty.

First, we need to set up a working group of women with disabilities to consider the goals of poverty eradication with an aim towards a qualitative transformation of the system. There is very little inclusion of women with disabilities in financial institutions especially high level economic implementation organizations such as federal banks and they are also not consulted in policy formulation and change. There is a need for the financial sector to adopt guidelines to ensure that low-cost banking and financial services are accessible to women with disabilities. Specified budgets and monitoring are essential to make policies work.

Secondly, we propose a Global Assembly of women with disabilities within the next year. The core idea is to bring forth the full potential of a dialogue. Invite experts including women with disabilities to do a Strategic Policy Planning Document relating Women with Disabilities to poverty eradication for the Summit.

Thirdly, we suggest that a special fund be set up to assist them to attend meetings with other women to discuss the contradictions that exist in poverty and access to economic well-being. (for instance meetings related to Disasters, Migration, Indigenous, Security Council Resolution 1325, Beijing process & Youth).

We recommend to the United Nations General Assembly the creation of an educational framework of promoting a sustainable development paradigm for all and in which women with disabilities fit in. Fourth, an internationally administered fund dedicated to education can empower them.

Our aim is to raise awareness among women with disabilities, to enable them to move from empowerment to leadership, within their communities. We need a global strategy with a focus on the local. Local authorities and communities are central to this process.

We need to pay importance to the education of girls/women with disabilities. To foster in women with disabilities the skills needed to deal with threats to life and human dignity while eradicating poverty. We need an education based on learning and reflecting and empowerment. A system not only based on information, but which will serve as catalyst of change which will create leadership and action. An education, which will not only provide knowledge, but inspire a deep sense of appreciation on issues related to their concerns and to exercise the leadership to generate real transformation.

We would urge that we seize this moment to transform the system. Based on self-reliance, autonomy and participation we look for a development in which the United Nations will play a pivotal role. We look forward to an era of hope of solidarity and change. We have a chance before us to change history to convert the challenges we face to positive change. We must not follow in the footsteps of earlier crises leaving defenceless people powerless. Now is the time to transform our civilization on principles of human dignity and interdependence.
